

Vindicated Hunt: Libel award ends 'open season'

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Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt broke down and cried yesterday after a jury agreed that he had been libeled by a newspaper article linking him to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

The federal jury awarded Hunt \$650,000 in damages for a 1978 article that appeared in *Spotlight*, a weekly newspaper owned by Liberty Lobby.

"I didn't care if the verdict was \$10 or a million," said Hunt. "Nothing really good, except my marriage, has happened to me in the last 10 years since Watergate."

The former CIA agent, who lives in Miami with his wife, Laura, had asked for \$3.6 million from Liberty Lobby. His attorney, Ellis Rubin, said Hunt's income dropped by \$27,000 in the year after publication of the Aug. 14, 1978, story, headlined "CIA to Nail Hunt for Kennedy Killing."

The article was written for a fee of \$500 by Victor Marchetti, another former CIA agent. Marchetti was not a defendant in the case.



Hunt

Hunt said that by its verdict, the jury indicated that "Watergate is over" for him, and that he has been punished enough for what he did 10 years ago. Hunt served 33 months in federal prison for his role in the Watergate break-in. "The findings of the jury should stand as a stern warning to others tempted to publish further libels against me," Hunt said.

Rubin said the jury "rejected open season on Watergate burglars" and "agreed that Hunt's name and reputation are just as valuable to him as anyone else."

Of the accusation of involvement with Kennedy's assassination, Hunt said, "It has been a dreadful sentence to live under, standing charged with no way to prove my innocence, accused of the murder of President Kennedy ... a heinous crime. Someone not accused of it can't understand what it was like from day to day." He said when he heard the verdict "I choked up ... I feel a great sense of relief."

The Marchetti article quoted a CIA memo as saying the agency "will have to explain Hunt's presence in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963 — the day President Kennedy was killed."

Hunt testified that he was in Washington when Kennedy was shot and that he knew nothing of the assassination beforehand.

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